

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Duluth Area Family YMCA

Application ID: 14AC156655

Program Name: AmeriCorps True North

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

The applicant provides convincing statistics showing that there are large discrepancies in achievement for various ethnic groups in Duluth Public Schools in both reading and math – approximately a 25 percentage point gap. In addition, students who are economically disadvantaged show low rates of reading and mathematics achievement.

The need for academic intervention is clear when seeing that less than half of students in chosen ethnicities graduate from secondary school. The long-range effects of low achievement data in the early grades affect secondary completion rates in the Duluth Public School district.

The applicant adequately describes Duluth Public Schools' current status as holding one of the largest achievement gaps in the state of Minnesota both among non-white students and/or students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch Program.

The applicant presents acceptable data noting a disparity among American Indian and African-American students, with lower scores in reading and math performance, as compared to white students.

The applicant clearly described the population and the achievement gap using statistics of both race and socioeconomic status of students, acknowledging that the achievement gap is not a simple problem related to ethnicity or race, but a more complex social phenomenon.

The Logic Model clearly outlines the activities that the Members will do with the targeted students and the level of interaction.

The Theory of Change described in the Logic Model and narrative shows how the program will progress from delivery of activities to achieving desired outcomes.

The applicant describes three intervention core activities: reading, mathematics, and out-of-school time activities.

The applicant bases each intervention model on studies of best practices and national data.

The applicant provides a detailed plan of evidence-based math and reading interventions for both the School Day Intervention plan and Out of School Time plan to be employed by AmeriCorps members as shown in the Logic Model.

The Theory of Change presented by the applicant was comprehensive, and incorporated social factors that can disrupt learning and achievement (e.g., the social effects of pulling students out of classrooms and the resulting negative effects on the classroom climate, including increases in isolation and bullying).

Weaknesses:

There is no comparative data concerning achievement rates to indicate the need for services.

The applicant uses data that is inconsistent and unclear when presenting the index score to assess the population disparity report.

None of the studies or national data have dates or discussion of methodologies used to arrive at results. It is impossible to determine whether or not the studies are current or have statistically significant positive results.

The applicant provides a vague timeline for the intervention. For instance, it is unclear if students will be placed in groups or tutored one on one and the duration of tutoring services.

It is unclear which group of students will be targeted as the applicant states the intervention group is from the “yellow-zone” however, the applicant failed to describe the target population, thus it is unclear the impact AmeriCorps members will have.

The applicant did not provide data or information on the research design of studies cited to support the program design, making the application insufficient to assess the internal validity of the evidence-based citations.

The applicant references participation in various activities and programs, but there is no evidence that past performance and work in these programs relate to solving identified problems: assisting students to raise reading and math achievement scores.

The applicant references Duluth Public Schools 4-year Continuing Improvement Plan, True North, School Success Teams, and Key Zone among the partnerships with YMCA, but does not sufficiently demonstrate any past performance in solving identified problems.

The application did not sufficiently describe their past performance.